

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1-352. (Canceled)

353. (Currently amended) A method for producing meat having a proportional fat content, comprising:

providing at least a first and second stream of meat having at least fat and water;

treating at least the first and second streams with a bacteria-reducing agent;

measuring at least the fat content of the first and second streams;

transferring a controlled amount of the first and second streams to a vessel having a selected gas, wherein the majority of said gas comprises gas other than air;

blending the first and second streams in the vessel to provide a blended stream of proportional fat content;

transferring the blended stream into a barrier package;

removing oxygen from the package;

sealing the package to contain the meat and gas with a free oxygen level lower than the oxygen level of air; and

testing the meat for the presence of bacteria.

354. (Currently amended) The method of Claim 353, wherein the package contains legally required information related to at least one animal from which the meat was harvested.

355. (Currently amended) [Method] The method of Claim 353, wherein the quantity of free oxygen, including oxygen that may be derived from the reduction of oxymyoglobin in meat in the sealed package, does not exceed 1,500 ppm.

356. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 353, wherein the bacteria-reducing agent includes a measured amount of water, wherein the measured water replaces water evaporated from the meat.

357. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 353, wherein the package is a chub package.

358. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 353, wherein the package is a case-ready modified-atmosphere package.

359. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 353, wherein the bacteria is *E. coli*.

360. (Currently amended) A method for processing meat primals, comprising:
obtaining meat primals having at least fat and water;
reducing the bacteria on the meat primals;
transferring the meat primals to containers;
removing oxygen from the containers;
sealing the containers;
storing the containers;
removing the primals from the containers and cutting the primals to provide primal portions;
placing the primal portions into barrier packages;
~~introducing a gas into the paekage packages, wherein the majority of said gas comprises gas other than air;~~
sealing the packages; and
testing the meat for the presence of bacteria.

361. (Currently amended) The method of Claim 360, wherein the packages contain ~~legally required information related to at least one animal from which the meat was harvested.~~

362. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 360, wherein the gas has oxygen in proportions higher than the proportion of oxygen in air.

363. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 360, wherein the gas has oxygen in proportions lower than the proportion of oxygen in air.

364. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 360, wherein the bacteria is *E. coli*.

365. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 360, wherein testing is done in the package.

366. (Currently amended) A method for producing ground meat, comprising:
grinding meat to provide ground meat;

exposing ground the meat to a gas before or during grinding, wherein said gas that inhibits bacterial growth, and wherein the majority of said gas comprises gas other than air;
transferring the ground meat to a web of barrier material;
sealing the web to enclose the ground meat in an atmosphere having an oxygen level lower than the oxygen level of air;
testing the ground meat for the presence of bacteria; and
applying indicia to the web, wherein the indicia includes include information related to the ground meat.

367. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 366, wherein the meat is ground in a gas having an oxygen content lower than the oxygen content of air, and the quantity of oxygen in the sealed web is not more than 500 ppm.

368. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 366, wherein the bacteria is *E. coli*.

369. (Currently amended) A method for producing a meat product, comprising:
harvesting meat composed portions from an animal, said portions comprised of several components having a variable relative ratio, including at least fat, muscle, and water, wherein the ratio of at least one component is determined;
treating the meat with an agent including water that inhibits the growth of bacteria;
grouping the meat into quantities classifications according to at least one variable component;
combining quantities of meat according to at least one of the variable components to provide a meat product with a combined quantity of at least one variable;
determining the proportion of water in the meat product;
enclosing the meat product within a packaging material to provide a packaged meat product;
testing the meat for the presence of bacteria; and
applying information to the package, including legally required information relating to the packaged meat product.

370. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 369, wherein the agent is acidic.

371. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 369, wherein the agent comprises carbonic acid.

372. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 369, wherein the package provides recesses to contain liquids that may escape from the meat.

373. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 369, wherein the bacteria is *E. coli*.

374-421. (Canceled)

422. (Currently amended) A method for packaging ~~retail packages~~ of meat, comprising:

obtaining meat ~~primal portions~~;

thereafter, transferring the ~~primal~~ meat ~~portions~~ to ~~retail~~ packaging trays;

thereafter, transferring the ~~retail~~ packaging trays to barrier containers;

thereafter, introducing a blend of gases to the barrier containers, wherein said gases include carbon monoxide; and

thereafter, sealing the barrier containers ~~with retail packaging trays and meat therein~~.

423. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 422, further comprising reducing the bacteria on the meat primals.

424. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 423, further comprising testing the meat for the presence of bacteria.

425. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 422, further comprising removing oxygen from the barrier containers.

426. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 425, further comprising storing the barrier containers.

427. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 367, wherein the gas contains carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, nitrogen, oxygen, or any combination thereof.

428. (Currently amended) A method for processing and packaging meat, comprising:

harvesting meat ~~composed~~ comprised of several components having a variable relative ratio, including at least fat, muscle, and water, wherein the ratio of at least one component is determined;

grouping the meat into ~~quantities~~ classifications according to at least one variable component;

combining quantities of meat according to at least one of the variable components to provide a meat product with a combined quantity of at least one variable;

determining the proportion of water in the meat product;

enclosing the meat product with a selected gas within a packaging material to provide a packaged meat product;

testing the meat for the presence of bacteria; and

applying information to the package, including ~~legally required~~ information relating to the packaged meat product.

429. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 428, wherein the selected gas contains an amount of carbon monoxide.

430. (Currently amended) A method for processing and packaging meat, comprising:

combining a first quantity of meat with a second quantity of meat, wherein at least one of said quantities of meat has been treated with a bacteria-reducing agent and an amount of water to provide a controlled amount of added water in the combined meat.

431. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 430, further comprising combining the first and second quantities of meat in proportions according to at least one variable in at least one of the selected quantities to provide proportioned meat.

432. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 431, further comprising transferring the proportioned meat into an enclosed conduit.

433. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 432, further comprising testing the meat for the presence of bacteria.

434. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 433, further comprising transferring the proportioned meat into packaging.

435. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 434, wherein the packaging comprises a barrier package containing a selected gas.

436. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 435, wherein the selected gas includes a measured amount of carbon monoxide.

437. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 433, wherein the bacteria is *E. coli*.

438. (Currently amended) A method for producing meat, comprising:

transferring a first stream of meat having at least one variable to a [[first]] device capable of measuring at least one variable;

transferring a second stream of meat having at least one variable to a second device capable of measuring at least one variable; and

combining the first and second streams of meat, wherein the first and second streams of meat have been in contact with a gas that has an oxygen content different from the oxygen content of air.

439. (Currently amended) A method for producing meat, comprising:

transferring a first stream of meat having at least one variable to a [[first]] device capable of measuring at least one variable;

transferring a second stream of meat having at least one variable to a second device capable of measuring at least one variable; and

combining the first and second streams of meat, wherein combining takes place in the presence of a gas that has an oxygen content different from the oxygen content of air.

440. (New) The method of Claim 366, wherein the information is related to at least one animal from which the meat was harvested.

441. (New) The method of Claim 369, wherein the information is related to at least one animal from which the meat was harvested.

442. (New) The method of Claim 428, wherein the information is related to at least one animal from which the meat was harvested.

443. (New) The method of Claim 353, wherein the package contains information related to a determined water content of the meat.

444. (New) The method of Claim 443, wherein said information relating to a determined water content of the meat is expressed as a ratio or percentage.

445. (New) The method of Claim 360, wherein the packages contain information related to a determined water content of the meat.

446. (New) The method of Claim 445, wherein said information relating to a determined water content of the meat is expressed as a ratio or percentage.

447. (New) The method of Claim 369, wherein the package contains information related to a determined water content of the meat.

448. (New) The method of Claim 447, wherein said information relating to a determined water content of the meat is expressed as a ratio or percentage.

449. (New) The method of Claim 428, wherein the package contains information related to a determined water content of the meat.

450. (New) The method of Claim 449, wherein said information relating to a determined water content of the meat is expressed as a ratio or percentage.

451. (New) The method of Claim 366, wherein the indicia contain information related to a determined water content of the meat.

452. (New) The method of Claim 451, wherein said information relating to a determined water content of the meat is expressed as a ratio or percentage.

453. (New) The method of Claim 422, wherein the containers contain information related to a determined water content of the meat.

454. (New) The method of Claim 453, wherein said information relating to a determined water content of the meat is expressed as a ratio or percentage.

455. (New) The method of Claim 434, wherein the packaging contains information related to a determined water content of the meat.

456. (New) The method of Claim 455, wherein said information relating to a determined water content of the meat is expressed as a ratio or percentage of the packaging.

457. (New) The method of Claim 438, further comprising packaging the combined meat in a package wherein the package contains information related to a determined water content of the packaged meat.

458. (New) The method of Claim 457, wherein said information relating to a determined water content of the meat is expressed as a ratio or percentage.

459. (New) The method of Claim 439, further comprising packaging the combined meat in a package wherein the package contains information related to a determined water content of the packaged meat.

460. (New) The method of Claim 459, wherein said information relating to a determined water content of the meat is expressed as a ratio or percentage.

461. (New) The method of Claim 425, further comprising storing the barrier containers for a minimum period of time wherein storing takes place prior to delivery to a distribution network of meat for human consumption.

462. (New) The method of Claim 369, further comprising storing the package for a minimum period of time wherein storing takes place prior to delivery to a distribution network of meat for human consumption.

463. (New) The method of Claim 361, further comprising storing the package for a minimum period of time wherein storing takes place prior to delivery to a distribution network of meat for human consumption.

464. (New) The method of Claim 366, further comprising storing the meat for a minimum period of time wherein storing takes place prior to delivery to a distribution network of meat for human consumption.

465. (New) The method of Claim 423, further comprising storing the containers for a minimum period of time wherein storing takes place prior to delivery to a distribution network of meat for human consumption.

466. (New) The method of Claim 428, further comprising storing the package for a minimum period of time wherein storing takes place prior to delivery to a distribution network of meat for human consumption.

467. (New) The method of Claim 429, further comprising storing the package for a minimum period of time wherein storing takes place prior to delivery to a distribution network of meat for human consumption.

468. (New) The method of Claim 442, further comprising storing the packaged meat for a minimum period of time wherein storing takes place prior to delivery to a distribution network of meat for human consumption.

469. (New) The method of Claim 438, wherein at least one meat production processing parameter or variable is manipulated, adjusted, or measured to produce meat having a water content controlled so as to not exceed a specified water content limit of said meat.

470. (New) The method of Claim 439, wherein at least one meat production processing parameter or variable is manipulated, adjusted, or measured to produce meat having a water content controlled so as to not exceed a specified water content limit of said meat.

471. (New) The method of Claim 353, wherein at least one meat production processing parameter or variable is manipulated, adjusted, or measured to produce meat having a water content controlled so as to not exceed a specified water content limit of said meat.

472. (New) The method of Claim 360, wherein at least one meat production processing parameter or variable is manipulated, adjusted, or measured to produce meat having a water content controlled so as to not exceed a specified water content limit of said meat.

473. (New) The method of Claim 366, wherein at least one meat production processing parameter or variable is manipulated, adjusted, or measured to produce meat having a water content controlled so as to not exceed a specified water content limit of said meat.

474. (New) The method of Claim 369, wherein at least one meat production processing parameter or variable is manipulated, adjusted, or measured to produce meat having a water content controlled so as to not exceed a specified water content limit of said meat.

475. (New) The method of Claim 428, wherein at least one meat production processing parameter or variable is manipulated, adjusted, or measured to produce meat having a water content controlled so as to not exceed a specified water content limit of said meat.

476. (New) The method of Claim 429, wherein at least one meat production processing parameter or variable is manipulated, adjusted, or measured to produce meat having a water content controlled so as to not exceed a specified water content limit of said meat.

477. (New) The method of Claim 353, wherein the gas comprises carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, nitrogen, oxygen, or any combination thereof.

478. (New) The method of Claim 363, wherein the gas comprises carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, nitrogen, oxygen, or any combination thereof.

479. (New) The method of Claim 366, wherein the gas comprises carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, nitrogen, oxygen, or any combination thereof.

480. (New) The method of Claim 369, wherein the package contains gas comprising carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, nitrogen, oxygen, or any combination thereof.

481. (New) The method of Claim 422, wherein the blend of gases comprises carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, nitrogen, oxygen, or any combination thereof.

482. (New) The method of Claim 438, wherein the gas comprises carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, nitrogen, oxygen, or any combination thereof.

483. (New) The method of Claim 439, wherein the gas comprises carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, nitrogen, oxygen, or any combination thereof.